

The Chesapeake's Main Stem EXPLORING THE TIDAL SUSQUEHANNA

Focused on finding precious minerals, searching out the Northwest Passage, and meeting Indian tribes, Captain John Smith concentrated his explorations primarily on the Chesapeake's rivers, rather than its main stem. Even so, he traveled the Bay's main stem, and he appears to have taken seriously the task of mapping the big water accurately for the mariners who would follow.

It is ironic, but understandable, that when he reached the falls of the Susquehanna, Smith did not recognize the degree to which that river is the source of the Chesapeake. In fact, we know now that from Smith's Falls on the Susquehanna to Point Lookout at the mouth of the Potomac, more than 90 percent of the freshwater in the Chesapeake comes from the Susquehanna, having fallen as rain in central Pennsylvania and south-central New York. The Upper Bay is the tidal Susquehanna, just as surely as the tidal Potomac below Washington, D.C., and Arlington, Virginia, is still the Potomac.

Even before the English arrived with seaworthy sailing ships the Bay was a vital transportation route. Indians are known to have traveled the open waters of the main stem of the Bay in canoes. The Bay continues to be a major travel artery important for both commercial shipping and recreational cruising.

CAPTAIN SMITH ON THE CHESAPEAKE MAIN STEM

Captain John Smith and his *Discovery Barge* crews made several short trips into the open Chesapeake on the way to Powhatan's capital at Werowocomoco on the Pamunkee River (today's York), but the bulk of his travel on the open Bay came during the two trips to the head of the Bay in the summer of 1608. On these trips, he and his crews made some impressive passages, including 202 miles (by historian Edward Haile's reckoning) from Kecoughtan (Old Point Comfort, Hampton, Virginia) to Smith's Falls on the Susquehanna (just above Port Deposit, Maryland) on July 27 through July 30. Clearly they had learned how to catch favorable winds and tidal currents.

The crew of the Sultana Projects' shallop, which explored the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail in the summer of 2007, found they were able to make similar passages, thanks in part to having several highly-trained and experienced sailors among their number. Their experience simply reinforces our admiration for how quickly Smith and his men learned to wring the best performance out of their heavily-built work vessel with its early 17th-century sail plan.

EXPLORING THE CHESAPEAKE MAIN STEM TODAY

These parts of the Captain John Smith Trail are the province of cruising boats, both power and sail. To see this water as Smith did, travel at five to seven knots and learn everything you can about the Bay from reading current tables and looking closely at the miles of open water and the shorelines. You can also learn from instruments that Smith could never have imagined, like your GPS chart plotter and your depth sounder. One aspect of the electronic

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION Chesapeake Bay Gateways

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is part of a much larger story of the Chesapeake Bay—a story with rich historical, natural, and environmental chapters for your discovery and enjoyment. Throughout the Bay watershed a variety of parks, wildlife refuges, maritime museums, historic sites, and trails tell their part of the Chesapeake story. These special places are part of the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network. Visit them to experience the authentic Chesapeake.

Many of these Gateways to the Chesapeake are located along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Those with boating access to the water trail are noted throughout this Boater's Guide. Others await your exploration by land. You can make virtual visits via the Gateway Network's website at www.baygateways.net where you can find sites by name, location, activities, or themes. As you travel the Main Stem of the Bay, learn more about important Chesapeake connections at the following Gateway sites and attractions.

CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE MAIN STEM OF THE BAY

First Landing State Park • Virginia Beach, VA

Mathews Blueways Water Trail • Mathews, VA

Mathews County Visitor Information Center • Mathews, VA

Deltaville Maritime Museum and Holly Point Nature Park • Deltaville, VA

Reedville Fishermen's Museum • Reedville, VA

Point Lookout State Park • Scotland, MD

Calvert Cliffs State Park • Lusby, MD

Parkers Creek Preserve • Port Republic, MD

Flag Ponds Nature Park • Lusby, MD

Chesapeake Beach Railway Museum • Chesapeake Beach, MD

Galesville Heritage Museum • Galesville, MD

Captain Salem Avery House Museum • Shady Side, MD

Historic London Town and Gardens • Edgewater, MD

Smithsonian Environmental Research Center • Edgewater, MD

Annapolis & Anne Arundel County Information Center • Annapolis, MD

Historic Annapolis Gateway – City Dock • Annapolis, MD

Annapolis Maritime Museum • Annapolis, MD

Sandy Point State Park • Annapolis, MD

Terrapin Park • Stevensville, MD

Cross Island Trail • Stevensville, MD

Chesapeake Exploration Center • Chester, MD

North Point State Park • Sparrows Point, MD

Baltimore and Annapolis Trail Park and Jonas Green Park • Anne Arundel County, MD

EXPLORING THE CHESAPEAKE'S MAIN STEM



PHOTO © MIDDLETON EVANS

The dramatic cliffs that are the namesake of Calvert Cliffs State Park attracted Captain Smith and his crew to the western shore of the Bay.

observations that will strike you is how clearly you'll be able to "see" the deep ancestral channel of the Susquehanna, carved when sea level was more than 300 feet lower during the last Ice Age (15,000–20,000 years ago).

If you'd like to study the details of how Captain John Smith made his passages, consult two veteran sailor/historians, Kent Mountford and Edward Wright Haile in *John Smith's Chesapeake Voyages*, 1607–1609 and *John Smith in the Chesapeake*, respectively. They have reconstructed Smith's voyages, even down to studying moon phases, "hind-casting" the tide tables, and speculating on how the typical wind patterns of Chesapeake summers would have made those voyages possible. (See Resources, p. 1.)

Trip Itineraries

Today, cruising boaters have developed some classic passages of 40 to 60 miles each that offer the feel of Captain Smith's voyages. Though these voyages vary according to personal preferences, here is a representative sample:



HAMPTON, VA, TO DELTAVILLE, VA (46 MILES)

Hampton (37° 00' 50" N, 76° 20' 22" W) to Deltaville (Fishing Bay, 37° 32' 17" N, 76° 20' 10" W)

DELTAVILLE, VA, TO SOLOMONS, MD (65 MILES)

Deltaville (Fishing Bay, 37° 32' 17" N, 76° 20' 10" W) to Solomons (38° 19' 15" N, 76° 26' 53" W)

SOLOMONS, MD, TO ANNAPOLIS, MD (52 MILES)

Solomons (38° 19' 15" N, 76° 26' 53" W) to Annapolis (38° 58' 05" N, 76° 27' 38" W)

ANNAPOLIS, MD, TO HAVRE DE GRACE, MD (51 MILES)

Annapolis (38° 58' 07" N, 76° 29' 54" W) to Havre de Grace (39° 32' 16" N, 76° 05' 27" W)



PHOTO BY GUY STEPHENS

Calvert Marine Museum, located in Solomons where the Patuxent River meets the Chesapeake Bay, is a focal point for visitors coming by land or water.



EXPLORING THE CHESAPEAKE'S MAIN STEM



PHOTO © MIDDLETON EVANS

Fishing at Sandy Point State Park near Annapolis, MD

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

POTOMAC ITINERARY

SMITH POINT MARINA, VA 37° 53' 00" N, 76° 15' 04" W 804-453-4077 www.smithpointmarina.com (ramp fee)

POINT LOOKOUT STATE PARK, MD 38° 03' 31" N, 76° 19' 46" W 301-872-5688 www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/ southern/pointlookout.html (ramp fee)

ANNAPOLIS ITINERARY

SANDY POINT STATE PARK, MD 39° 00' 46" N, 76° 24' 04" W 410-974-2149 www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/ southern/sandypoint.html (ramp fee)

MATAPEAKE STATE PARK, MD 38° 57' 16" N, 76° 21' 20" W 410-279-1619 www.dnr.maryland.gov/boating/ queenannes.asp (ramp fee)

PADDLING AND SKIFFING AROUND THE MOUTH OF THE POTOMAC



To get a sense of the expanse of the open Chesapeake at one of its widest points, launch at Smith Point Marina, Virginia, or Point Lookout State Park, Maryland. From either launch point, it is 11 miles to the other, and about 13 miles across to the line of low, marshy islands that extend from Tangier Island, Virginia, north to Smith Island, Maryland.

This is huge water for the Chesapeake, so pay close attention to the weather before you go and while on the water. If you have charts, GPS, and a depth sounder, watch them closely too. Just because the surface looks like a featureless mass of water doesn't mean that what's underwater is also uniform. In fact, you'll find that there are plenty of interesting features beneath you that will give you a sense of place in this open water.

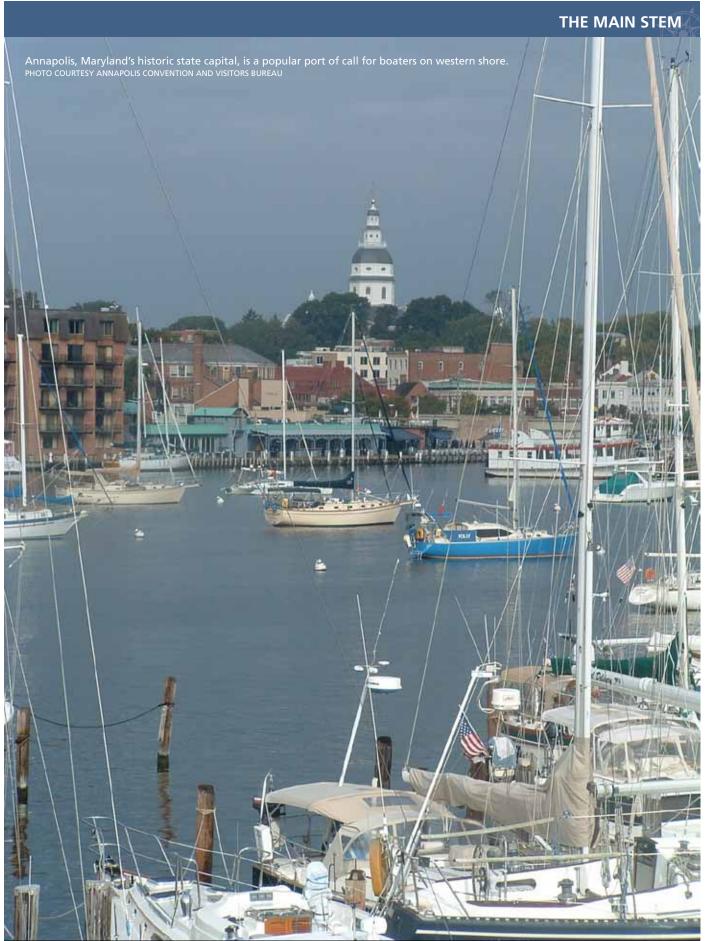
PADDLING AND SKIFFING OUT OF ANNAPOLIS



To get a sense of this part of the open Chesapeake, launch at Sandy Point State Park, at the western end of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge near Annapolis or at Matapeake State Park on Kent Island just south of the eastern end of the Bay Bridge.

Though perhaps less intimidating than the open Bay around the mouth of the Potomac, this is also big water that demands respect from trail explorers in small boats. The combination of wind and current directions is an important issue to watch. The Bay has long fetches from both north and south here. A strong northerly wind (typical after a cold front passes) bucking a flood current or a southerly wind (typical on summer afternoons) bucking a powerful ebb can create a nasty two- to three-foot chop with "sheep in the pasture" (whitecaps). They will give a small boat plenty of trouble. Think of what it would have felt like to live with these seas while making long passages in the open *Discovery Barge*.

As at the mouth of the Potomac, if you have charts, GPS, and a depth sounder, pay close attention to them. One especially interesting spot is the 80- to 90-foot deep trench under the eastern shore high span of the Bay Bridge. That is the channel of the ancestral Susquehanna, a remnant of the Ice Age. Captain John Smith and his crew sailed down it on their way south to the Rappahannock on August 10, 1608. There is no record that he sounded it with his leadline. If he had, he would have been amazed.



National Park Service • Chesapeake Bay Office